

3/19/2007

Dear Friend:

Today we recognize the fourth anniversary of the start of the Iraq War. Four years ago, the catch phrase was shock and awe, a reference to the technologically advanced military might being unleashed. Today, a more apt catch phrase would be dismay and disillusion. Our dismay is for the 3,200 young Americans that we remember on this solemn anniversary, who lost their lives in a distant land; for the more than 24,000 young Americans wounded, some of whom returned to inadequate care in substandard military and veterans' facilities, despite the great personal sacrifices they made for their country; and for our nation, which has seen its reputation erode from worldwide support following 9/11 to riotous opposition in the streets on just about any international stop the President makes.

Our disillusion is for the quagmire we now find ourselves in. Promised that we'd be greeted as liberators only to be viewed as an occupying force, we now must ask, "how do we remove ourselves without destroying the prospects of democracy in Iraq and stability throughout the Middle East."

Although I opposed authorizing the President's use of force in Iraq from the beginning, with the wounds of the 9/11 terrorist attacks still tender, much of America backed the President with faith and good intent. Faith that the President was going to war only as a last resort, having exhausted all diplomatic options, and with the intention of removing a threat not only to the stability of the Middle East, but to us here at home as well.

Four years later, we find we have removed a dictator with a nonexistent cache of weapons of mass destruction. And with no plan to keep the peace in Iraq, we helped create a civil war that has the men and women of our armed services, already deployed on extended tours beyond the point of exhaustion, caught in the crossfire.

Congress is the people's body of government, the institution our founding fathers established to reflect the will of the people. As such, it is imperative that Congress respond to the will of the people. Every recent survey of American public opinion shows by clear majorities that our citizens overwhelmingly disapprove of the President's handling of Iraq, and more Americans believe Congress, and not the President, should be primarily responsible for setting policy in Iraq.

Last week, in the House Appropriations Committee, I supported passage of the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act. This supplemental appropriations bill provides more funding for our troops — for equipment, training and support services — than the President's request. It offers a new direction that promises to finally bring closure to our open-ended commitment in Iraq, with provisions culminating in the redeployment of our U.S. troops from Iraq. It ensures troop deployments adhere to the Department of Defense's own standards for readiness, including the length of time that troops can be deployed in Iraq and the length of time they are entitled to remain at home, while holding the Iraqi government accountable and making sure it meets the benchmark standards previously outlined by the President. And this bill re-focuses our attention on those responsible for the attacks of 9/11, the resurgent al Qaeda and Taliban, both of which have been gaining strength recently in Afghanistan while our troops have been bogged down between warring factions in Iraq.

Finally, for our returning troops, this bill promises to give them the health care that they need, with the honor they deserve for honoring us with their service. I hope my colleagues will join me this week in supporting passage of this legislation when we consider it on the House floor.

Very Truly Yours,

*Tom Udall*  
*Member of Congress*